Comparative Theology;

Or,

The True and Solid Grounds

OF

Pure and Peaceable *THEOLOGY.*

A Subject very Neceſſary, tho' hitherto almoſt wholly neglected.

Propoſed in an Univerſity DISCOURSE.

And now Tranſlated from the Printed *Latin* Copy, with ſome few Enlargements by the Author.

Gemmula grata magis quam magno Pondere ferrum.

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THE

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PUBLISHER of the TRANSLATION
TO THE
READER.

THE *Wiſdom that's from above is firſt Pure, then Peaceable:* How far the Chriſtian World is at this day from theſe divine Qualities is but too viſible. Men have ſo transform'd the Chriſtian Doctrine by their Gloſſes, as it is now hardly to be found among them in its Truth and

Simplicity. The Doctrine of Jesus Christ, as it is deliver'd unto us by his Apostles, is not now to be considered as the Standard of Christianity, so much as the *Shorter and Larger Catechisms, the Westminster Confession, the Trent Creed and Canons*, &c. In defence of which, Men relinquish and reject the true Spirit and Essence of Christianity, the Love of God, and their Neighbours; and frame to themselves such a Doctrine as will flatter their corrupt Nature, and foster their Pride and Envy. In some Nations it has been the great Idol of differing Families and Tribes,

to

to keep up their Feuds and Enmities among themſelves, and to proſecute them to the laſt Extremities in the mutual deſtruction of one another: Such a bloody and irreconcilable Diſpoſition, tho' it has been juſtly eſteem'd Barbarous in them, is yet look'd upon to be a gracious and a holy Zeal in the ſeveral Tribes and Parties of Chriſtians, every one contending ſo earneſtly, and diſputing with ſuch Heat and Concern, that they may maintain their own Sect and Sett of Opinions in oppoſition to all others. And the Generality of the Reſpective Spi-

ritual Heads and Guides, are so far from doing their Duty in restraining these Barbarities, as they will not hear of any Principles or Proposals that may tend this way, but if any thing be offered that may contribute to sweeten the Minds of Men toward one another, they make it their Business to treat the Proposers as common Enemies, and to give such Characters both of them, and of their Sentiments, as may lead the People to abhor them.

The prejudices which the false Representations of Religion do to the true Interest thereof, and to the Souls of Men,

Men, are innumerable: and how hurtful they are to Societies and Commonwealths, the present as well as former Ages is a sufficient Evidence; the Factions in the State can never find fitter Tools for carrying on their Designs, than those of the Church; who are ready to sacrifice both the Liberties and Wealth of their Country, with the Life of Religion it self, to the little Interests of their Parties: so as we are all concerned both as we are Men, and as we are Christians in this our Day to know the things that belong to our Peace, before they be hid from our Eyes.

To the Reader.

The following Diſcourſe was originally intended by the Author to form in the Minds of thoſe Youth, whom he was to train up in Theological Studies, ſuch juſt and adequate Notions of Religion in all its parts, as might raiſe their Concern for thoſe things in it that are abſolutely Neceſſary and Eſſential; and preſerve them from a blind, ungovernable, and furious Zeal for thoſe other things, which are either merely circumſtantial, or at leaſt not neceſſary, nor of the Eſſence thereof, altho' they are now become the Pillar and Ground of moſt, if not of all the

the unhappy and unaccountable Contentions that are abroad in the Christian world. And a written Copy thereof falling into the hands of some Persons, for whose Judgement the Author has a Great Esteem, they obtain'd his Permission to make it publick: Seeing some Persons have been ready since the Publication thereof, to give ill Impressions of it, unto those who do not understand the *Latin* Tongue, it has been thought fit to publish it in *English*, that such might peruse it with their own, and not with other Men's Eyes.

To the Reader.

The few Enlargements that have been made in this Tranſlation are plac'd between Crotchets [ ] ſo that they will be eaſily diſcern'd by the Reader. That this Diſcourſe may by the Bleſſing of God, contribute to lead Men to the true Knowledge and Love of God, in Chriſt Jeſus, and to mutual Peace and Charity with one another, is the earneſt Prayer both of the Author and Publiſher.

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LATIN
TO THE
READER.

Chriſtian Reader,

THere be many who have written of *abſolute Theology*, and that oftimes to little purpoſe, but I have never heretofore met with any who

have treated of *Comparative Theologie*.

When by chance I happen'd first to read this Discourse, it did appear to me so Excellent, the Subject so Necessary, and treated withal in that Saving Way which is not common, that I thought the making of it publick, would be a good Office done to all, who aspire after solid Knowledge in Christianity and Divine things.

To the Reader.

If you desire to know the Author, the Dissertation it self does plainly shew, that he has for some time been the Instructor of Students in Theology in some University: To know more of him, is not necessary, it may be, not expedient, while there are such Heats among the several Parties of Christians. In the mean time, it were to be wish'd, that those who have the Charge of others

thers to inſtruct them in divine things, would ſeaſon them with the like Doctrine, then ſhould we ſee Chriſtian Churches and Common-Wealths, and every private Perſon alſo grow and advance daily in all Good, and in Peace and Favour with God and Man: which may our infinitely good God grant, to whom be Glory for ever. *Amen.*

A DISCOURSE Concerning COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY.

[*The Introduction. The ground of the Distinction of Theologie into Absolute and Comparative. Both are describ'd. Inconveniencies arising from the Ignorance of Comparative Theologie. The Heads of the following Discourse.*]

§. 1. ALtho' all the Parts of the Christian Religion do agree in

in this, that they are revealed and enjoin'd by God; and alſo, that they are directed to the Glory of God, and the Salvation of Men; yet they are not all of the ſame Weight and Importance: but being weigh'd in the Ballance of a Sound Judgment, ſome of them are found to be more weighty than others. The Prophets tell us, that *Mercy, the Knowledge of God,* and *Obedience to his Commands,* are more acceptable to him than *Sacrifices and Burnt-Offerings,* 1 Sam. 15, 22. Hoſ. 6, 6. and our bleſſed Lord calls *Judgment, Mercy and Truth,* compar'd with

Tythes

Tythes of Mint, Cummin and Anise, τα βαρύτερα τȣ̃ νομȣ̃, the *more weighty things of the Law.* Matth. 23, 23. From this Consideration there ariseth a Distinction or Division of that *Skill, Knowledge and Understanding* which is conversant about Religion, and which is commonly call'd *Theologie*, or *Divinity*, into *Absolute*, and *Respective* or *Comparative*. *Absolute Theologie*, or that Knowledge of Religion which I call absolute, considers its Object only as revealed and enjoined, or instituted by God, and its business is to find out those things which are proposed to

us

us in the Scriptures to be believ'd or practis'd, and to discern and distinguish them from all others. Again, *Comparative Theologie*, or the respective Knowledge of Religion ponders the weight or importance, and observes the Order, Respect and Relation of things belonging to Religion; whether they be points of Doctrine, or Precepts, or sacred Rites, and teaches to distinguish and put a difference between the *Accessories* of Religion, and the *Principals*; the *Circumstantials* and *Substantials*; the *Means* and their *Ends*.

§. 2,

§. 2. In a preliminary Discourse to our Divinity Lectures of the last Year, speaking of the Differences about the Christian Religion, that are in the Christian Church, I touch'd this Distinction by the by; and among the proper Remedies of this Evil, I mention'd the Doctrine of *Comparative Theologie*. And indeed the oftner I reflect upon, and the more narrowly I consider this Matter, I am the more convinc'd, and confirm'd in my Opinion, of the great Usefulness and Necessity of this Doctrine. Nor do I much question but you, *my Friends*, will be easily per-

swa-

ſwaded to be of my Mind, when you ſhall perceive that the corrupt and dangerous State of the Chriſtian Church at preſent, is in a great degree owing to the want of this *Comparative knowledge of Religion*, or of a due regard had to it. For, that among all Sects and Parties of Chriſtians, true Piety is neglected, and divine Charity and brotherly Love are waxed cold; that they are cold and remiſs in rooting out the Luſts and deprav'd Affections of corrupt Nature; when in the mean time, they lay themſelves out with Zeal and application for the propagating ſome Opi-

Opinions that be either ob ſcure or uncertain, but no ways neceſſary, and for the ſuppreſſing others of the ſame Nature which are not hurtful; that ſome Religious Rites and Ceremonies are pertinaceouſly retain'd by ſome Chriſtians, and as obſtinately rejected by others; that they are at peace with Vice and vicious Perſons, while they wage a Cruel War with Error and erring Perſons. Theſe things are not ſo much to be imputed to the want of an *Abſolute Knowledge* of Religion, as of that which is *Comparative*. No more can this

this be attributed to their being ignorant of any Christian Precept, or of any absolute Divine Truth that is of any import to Salvation: But 'tis because the Generality of Christians either do not know, or will not consider how much *Repentance*, *Self-denial*, *Mortifying of the Flesh*, *Charity*, *Humility*, &c. are of more weight than *Orthodoxy* or a *Sound Belief*; and *Sin* and *Vice* more hateful than *Error*: The *Essential Principles* of Religion excepted in both Cases. Since then the use of *Comparative Theologie* is of so large extent, both for ordering the Lives and Manners

ners of private Christians aright, and for settling the publick Affairs which concern the Peace of the Churches within themselves, and their mutual Concord with one another: I presume then, dear Fellow Students, it will be a good Office done to you, and nothing disagreeable to the rest of my Hearers, if I shall furnish you with a Key, by which you may enter into the most remote and intricate Recesses of this so often commended Theology.

§. 3. That I may avoid rambling to and agen without Order or Method in this Discourse, I shall comprise what I have

have to ſay under three General heads. (1) I ſhall give a rude Draught and general Idea of this *Theologie*. (2) I ſhall deſcend to a more particular deſcription of it. And in the third place, I ſhall lay down ſome Concluſions or Poſitions, which do naturally flow from this Doctrine of *Comparative Theologie*, and are worthy of your Obſervation.

Sect. 1.

SECT. 1.

[*Wherein Comparative Theologie is handled in a General way. The State wherein Man was Created; Man's Duty in that State. The reason of the Prohibition concerning the Tree of knowledge of Good and Evil. The Fall of Man occasioned the enlargement of Religion A genereal Idea of this. Theologie.*]

§. 4. AS to the first, it is to be considered that the *Essence* of Religion, orof the Duty whichMan owes to God,

God, or which God requires of Man, in whatſoever State, whether that of Integrity and Innocence, or Reſtoration after the Fall, or conſummated Felicity, doth ſolely conſiſt in the LOVE of GOD, as our Saviour teacheth us, *Matth*, 22, 37. where he ſays, that the firſt and greateſt Commandment of the Law is to *love the Lord our God with all our Heart, and with all our Soul, with all our Mind, and with all our Strength.* For God being ſelf ſufficient, and independent of all other Beings, did not in the leaſt ſtand in need of the Creatures and their Service: but being de-

ter-

termined by a moſt free, unconſtrain'd, and unneceſſary Act of his good Pleaſure, to take his delight with ſomething without himſelf, he did for that end, after the Creation and Fall of the Angels, make Man in his own Image (that is, of a Nature like his own) with whom he might live in Friendſhip, and have all things in common; by offering Himſelf, with all His glorious and amiable Perfections to be deliciouſly enjoyed by Man; and by receiving from him the grateful Return of a Reciprocal Love and Affection. And becauſe Man is a Crea-

 true

ture made up of a Soul, a ſpiritual Subſtance, and a Body which is material: God created this viſible and Corporeal World, and furniſhed it with innumerable Objects for the delighting the outward Senſes, and recreating thoſe Faculties which belong to the Soul, as it is join'd and united to the Body; and made Man Lord over it. To this end, that as the Soul had God the Infinite Good, fitted and proportioned to its vaſt Capacity, ſo the Body alſo might not be without ſuitable and delightful Objects. And to this Deſign of God in the Creation of the World, the Hiſtory

ſtory thereof doth excellently agree; wherein we read that this whole Viſible World, was at firſt created and finiſhed, as a Magnificent Palace richly provided with all Kinds of Furniture, and that after this, Man, who was deſign'd to be its Lord and Maſter, was made and inveſted with the Dominion of it.

§. 5. For ſo great Favours, ſo liberally diſpens'd unto Man, God required, or rather expected no other Teſtimony of a grateful Mind but LOVE. And that his Love might be noble and free, generous and unlimited, not neceſſitated, forced or reſtrict-

ed; it was the will of God that Man ſhould be at his own diſpoſal, and therefore he endued him with a free Power of determining the Acts and Exerciſes of his faculties to theſe or the other Objects; of adhereing to God by Love or departing from him; and provided he ſtill continued to Love God and to place his delight in him alone, nothing was forbidden him: All things were lawful unto him, and he was Maſter of Power moſt free (not only in a Phyſical, but alſo in a Moral Senſe) to diſpoſe of all his faculties, and of the Creatures ſubjected to him at his

his Pleaſure, and that without any Offence to God. As for the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, concerning which the Scriptures inform us, that God charged *Adam* not to Eat of it; this was not done out of Envy, as if God had grudged him that pleaſant Fruit (as he was ſlander'd by the Devil) or intended in the leaſt to diminiſh or infringe the full and free Right and Power which he had beſtowed upon him of uſing his faculties, and all things under his command at his Pleaſure, without prejudice always of the Love he owed to his Maker. But it

is not improbable that God having even then discovered in Man some remote and dawning Dispositions to the Love of the Creatures, did forbid him the use of one Tree; either because his Inclinations to it were greater than was fit, or that by this Symbol he might keep Man mindful that he held all the rest, whereof the free use was allowed to him, by *Right* of *Vassalage*, only with a Dependance upon God the Over-Lord of all, to whom on that account, he owed the Greatest Love.

§. 6.

§ 6. After that Man had abuſed the Liberty beſtowed upon him, by transferring his Love from God to the Creatures, and had thereby violated the Law of his Creation and the League of Friendſhip that was contracted with God, and had alſo loſt the Love of God, and with it, the bleſſed Preſence and Company of the Deity who dwelt in his Soul, and fill'd it with Light, and Joy, and Peace; to which ſucceeded Darkneſs, Anguiſh and Diſquiet: After, I ſay, that Man had made defection from God, and God was determin'd to reſtore Man, then

did the Confines of Religion begin to be enlarged, and beſides the *Love of God* which was loſt, and ſtill holds the Principal place among the divine Precepts and Duties of Religion; ſeveral other things were revealed, preſcribed, and inſtituted to be obſerv'd by Man, as being ſome of them uſeful, and others neceſſary for recovering the *Love of God* that was loſt, and for bringing back Man, that was gone aſtray into the road of his Duty.

§. 7. Out of what hath been already ſaid, this Succinct and *General Idea* of the Doctrine of *Comparative Theologie*

logie doth ariſe, *viz.* In the State of *Nature's Integrity and Innocence*, the *Love of God* made up the whole of Religion, nor was there any other Duty incumbent on Man, but to *love the Lord his God with all his Heart.* Again in the State of *Nature depravʼd*, and conſiderʼd as it is to be repairʼd and renewed, the ſame *Love of God* ſtill makes the firſt, the Chief and Capital part of Religion, which alone is deſired for it ſelf, and for whoſe ſake all the other things belonging to Religion are enjoined: So that the Love of God being compar'd with the

remaining parts of Religion, is the end to which they all refer and lead as so many *Ways* and *Means*.

SECT. II.

[*Wherein this Theologie is more distinctly and particularly explain'd. A Scheme of the Christian Religion, shewing the weight and importance of all the Parts thereof. Two particulars in it worthy of Observation.*]

§. 8. FOR a more particular and distinct Explication of this Doctrine of *Comparative Theologie*, thus

thus ſummarily propoſed, we are in the next place to ſhew how, and in what order all the other Precepts and Inſtitutions of Religion do reſpect *Charity* or the *Love of God*, and ſerve for kindling up again that heavenly Flame in the Hearts of Men.

§. 9. Firſt then, inaſmuch as Man had unworthily violated the League of Friendſhip into which God had vouchſafed to admit him, and by transferring unto the *Creatures* the Love and Affection that is due to *God only*, had drawn upon himſelf God's Diſpleaſure, and expoſed himſelf unto Eternal Death;

Death; 'twas impoſſible that he could be reſtored unto his former State, without the *Grace* and *Mercy* of God pardoning his Offence on theſe terms, (and none more eaſie could be either deſired or granted) *viz.* That Man ſhould return to his Duty, that is, to the *Love of God*; and that for this Effect God ſhould allow unto Man a competent Time, together with ſuch Helps as were neceſſary for that purpoſe.

§. 10. For obtaining of this Mercy, the *Interceſſion* of a *Mediator* was neceſſary; one who might procure this by his *Merit* and *Favour* with God:

God. I ſhall not make it my Buſineſs here to enquire into the Cauſes and Reaſons why God would not be reconcil'd to fall'n Man without the intervention of a Mediator. That he would not, is evident from this, becauſe for want of a Mediator the fall'n Angels were precluded from any acceſs to the Grace and Favour of God. But the Reaſon why the Son of God paſſing by the fall'n Angels undertook the Cauſe of fall'n Man, ſeems to be partly the Relation of the ſame common Nature; *For he took not on him the Nature of Angels, but the Seed of Abraham*, Heb. 2, 16.

16. and the vertue and efficacy of his Incarnation, together with what he did and ſuffer'd in the Fleſh, began to take place immediately after Man's Fall, whence our bleſſed Saviour is call'd, *The Lamb ſlain from the beginning of the World.* Rev. 13. 8.) partly becauſe the whole Race of Mankind falling in and with their Stock, the Caſe of *Adam*'s Poſterity deſerv'd Commiſeration, they being made obnoxious unto, and involv'd in everlaſting Miſery, before they came to exiſt by themſelves out of their Seminal Principles, or to enioy the uſe of their Reaſon and Liberty.

§. 11.

§. 11. To this mean of Salvation which is placed without us, and hath no dependence upon us, that which anſwers on our parts is *Love* and *Gratitude* to Jeſus Chriſt, who became our Surety to God; and *Faith*, whereby we aſcribe to him thoſe hopes of Salvation that he hath purchaſed for us, and rely on his Merits and Interceſſion for the pardon of our Sins, the acceptance of our Services with God, and the obtaining of every thing that is good for us.

§. 12. Becauſe the *Pardon* which Chriſt procur'd for fall'n Man is only *Conditional*, and

and the *Conditions* which God requires of us in order to our being reſtored to his favour (*viz.* that being unfainedly penitent for our Sins we ſhould return to God and our Duty, reſtore unto him the full poſſeſſion of our hearts, and both begin and ever continue to love him with all our Soul) are ſuch as they cannot directly, immediately, and at once be perform'd by us, becauſe of the thick Clouds of Ignorance and the corrupt Affections wherewith Sin hath fill'd our Minds; therefore ſome *Means* muſt of *Neceſſity* be preſcrib'd and made uſe of for this end, by

by which, as by Steps, we may gradually aſcend to the perfect Love of God, which is ſeated, as it were, upon the high Throne of Religion. Such means hath God preſcribed in his word, and by ſo doing hath adopted them into the Family of Religion.

§. 13. 'Tis clear and evident in it ſelf, that in returning to the *Love of God* we muſt take a courſe quite contrary to that by which Man departed from it. Seeing then Man loſt this Love of God, not by enjoying of nor taking his divertiſement with the Creatures (both which he might lawfully do) but by

by uniting his Heart unto them by Love, it follows, that if we would have this Divine fire to descend upon the Altar of our Hearts, we must of necessity *extinguish* and put out the impure and muddy *Love of the World*, and of the *Creatures*: for the love of God, and the love of the Creatures cannot subsist together in one and the same Subject, but do mutually expell each other out of the heart of Man: *For if any Man love the World, the love of the Father is not in him*, as St. *John* affirmeth, 1 *John* 2. 15. because God requires that the Heart of Man be offer'd unto him

him whole and entire; *My Son* (ſaith he) *give me thy heart*, Prov. 23, 26. Nor can he allow a Rival with him in Man's Love; as ſoon as Man admits new and ſtrange loves into his Heart, God forſakes it as polluted and defiled. But ſuch is the Good-will and Mercy of God in Chriſt Jeſus towards ſtraying Man, that no ſooner, is the heart of Man offered unto him pure and void of the Love of the Creatures, but as ſoon he is willing to re-enter and dwell in it, and to fill it with divine Light and Joy. And to this mean of recovering the Love of God, do all thoſe

Pre-

Precepts of Religion belong which forbid to *love*, *covet*, or *ſeek after*, the *World*, its *Riches*, *Honours*, *Pleaſures*, or any created Thing.

§. 14. Again, as in order to the recovery of the *Love of God*, the love of the Creatures muſt be laid aſide; ſo likewiſe, that Man may be freed from this love of the Creatures, it is needful that he abſtain as much as may be, from the *Converſe and Uſe of the Creatures*, thoſe eſpecially that are grateful and pleaſing to the Fleſh: For beſides that it appears unjuſt and unreaſonable that Rebels, and Traytours ſhould preſume to

meddle

meddle with the Divertiſements that were provided for dutiful and obedient Children; ſo unſteady and frail is Humane Nature ſince it was depraved by Sin, that it cannot view nor enjoy thoſe delights, without being inveigled in their Love. And therefore it behoveth us in our Food, Cloathing, and other means of Life, to reſt contented with things neceſſary, and induſtriouſly to avoid ſuch as be delightful.

§. 15. That which makes this part of our Duty the more eaſie, is the Curſing of the Earth, and the defacement of at leaſt this ſublu-

nary

nary World, which by the wiſe and juſt Providence of God was the Conſequence of *Adam*'s Fall; by reaſon of which, the World as it now is, differs as much from it ſelf as it was before the Fall, as a vile Dungeon does, from a Royal and Magnificent Palace. Concerning this Corruption of the World, the Apoſtle ſpeaks, *Rom.* 8. 20, 21, & 22. where he ſays; *The Creature was made ſubject to Vanity, not willingly:* And that *at laſt the Creature it ſelf ſhall be delivered from the Bondage of Corruption.* If Men be paſſionately in love with

with this wretched Carcaſs of a World! What would they have done, if they had ſeen and poſſeſt it in its primitive Perfection of Splendour and Beauty?

§. 16. Furthermore, becauſe *Self-love* is no leſs an Enemy to the Love of God, than is that of the other Creatures, and does uſually raiſe Trophies to it ſelf upon the others Ruines, it muſt of neceſſity be put off alſo; and to effectuate this, we muſt keep up a conſtant Warfare with our corrupt Nature, all whoſe *Thoughts*, *Counſels* and *Deſires* are by the Verdict of God himſelf, *Gen.* 6.

5. *only and continually Evil*: whatever it desires must be denied it, and the things for which it hath an Aversion must be forc'd upon it. We must do nothing to gratifie it, but its Motions must still be resisted to the end, that it being brought into Subjection, may never more obstruct or retard the operations of God's Spirit renewing Man in the Heart. And because all these things are hard and grievous, and very unacceptable to our corrupt Nature, we will never be throughly enclin'd to put them in practice; until the Mind being duely affected with a sorrowful Sense of Sin

Sin, and of its own Misery do first groan under the burden thereof, and aspire after deliverance from it. And these means which serve to extinguish *the love of the Creatures in the Hearts of Men*, are the same which Christ and his Apostles do so frequently inculcate to us in the holy Scriptures, when they enjoin us *Repentance*, *Self-denial*, *Renouncing the World*, *Crucifying of the Flesh*, *Taking up of the Cross*, *and putting off the Old man*.

§. 17. Moreover, as it is only the *Gracious* and *immediate presence of the Deity*, filling the Soul with Light and Joy that can beget there-

in the true Love of God, which is the perfection of all Religion: So the other means of Salvation that I have already nam'd, do ſpring from a higher and far more Noble Principle than our Nature. For ſeeing the Human Nature as it is depraved by Sin, is blind, and ſeeketh it ſelf and its own advantages in all things, always and every where; and ſeeing the Precepts of Religion, of which we are ſpeaking, are moſt unpleaſing and hateful unto it; it is evident that a compliance with them cannot be expected without the aſſiſtance of *Divine Grace*. And that

that, both *Internal*, which acteth upon the Mind *immediately*, inſtructing, alluring, perſwading and exciting it; and alſo *External*, which worketh by the *Mediation* of the outward Senſes: So that it is not without ground that the Apoſtle ſays: *It is God that worketh in us both to will and to do.* Phil. 2, 3. For the obtaining of this Mean which is only in God's Power, there is requir'd on our part continual Prayer, and a ready Compliance with the Inſpirations of the Holy Ghoſt. *Ask*, ſaith our Lord Chriſt, *and ye ſhall receive.* Matth. 7, 7. and *grieve not the Holy*

Spirit of God, ſaith the Apoſtle, *Eph.* 4, 30.

§. 18. But inaſmuch as the inward Manifeſtations of the Holy Ghoſt do require a calm and compoſed Mind; and the ſoft Whiſpers, the ſweet and gentle Voice of the holy Spirit teaching and admoniſhing in the bottom of the Heart cannot be heard and obſerved by unregenerate Men, becauſe of the obſtreperous Noiſe, and din of bluſtring and tumultuating Paſſions and Luſts; therefor it became neceſſary to call in the aſſiſtance of a *Groſs* and *Corporeal* way of teaching, ſuch as might make its way

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to the Mind through the eternal Senſes. For this reaſon God ſent the *Prophets* (to whom he had firſt manifeſted himſelf, partly by Viſions repreſented to their Fancies, ſometimes when they ſlept, and ſometimes when they were awake, and partly by a Voice and outward Signs) that they might warn and admoniſh other Men in his Name, concerning thoſe things that belong'd to their Salvation. And whereas from *Adam*'s Fall downwards, Mankind growing ſtill worſe, breaking out into divers kinds of Sins, and adding new Crimes to their old Vi-

ces, wandered ſtill farther from God, it became expedient that God ſhould warn them of their Danger, by new Advertiſements from time to time, and that he ſhould multiply his Precepts according to the diverſity of the Sins, whereby Men ignorantly and inconſiderately ſtrayed from the way of Salvation, until at length the Wickedneſs of Men being riſen to an Extraordinary height, and the Revelations of the Prophets, not being able to put a ſtop thereunto, the only begotten *Son of God* in his great Love to Mankind, putting on our mortal Nature

Nature with all its Infirmities (yet without Sin) vouchſafed to dwell among Men, that he might perfectly inſtruct them in all that concern'd their Salvation, and in a frail and mortal Body, like that which we bear about with us, might lead ſuch a Life, as is neceſſarily to be led by All who ſhall be ſaved: that ſo by a ſenſible Experiment, he might convince us that a Chriſtian Life is not impoſſible to our Frailty, when fortified with the Aids of divine Grace: And finally might lay down his Life for Expiating the Sins of Men.

§. 19. Alſo, the whole Doctrine of Religion comprehending the Diſcourſes and Deportment of Jeſus Chriſt, together with the Revelations of the Prophets and the Apoſtles is recorded in the Scriptures as in publick Regiſters; that by this means it might be far and near diffuſed throughout the World. The *Scriptures* therefore are neceſſary, that the Precepts of Religion, and the means of Salvation already nam'd, might be made known unto Men.

§. 20. But theſe are not yet all the Expedients that God hath made uſe of, for rendring

ring Man's return to his *Love* and his way to Salvation the more plain and eaſie. Tho' all that which Men are concern'd to know and practice in order to their Salvation, be ſo fully and plainly delivered in the Scriptures, that all who are deſirous to learn them, may with a due Application, eaſily there diſcover them; Yet there be many who do not apply themſelves to the reading of the Scriptures; many who blinded with Prejudice, are ſlow to underſtand that which they do read; others are remiſs and negligent in performing what they do underſtand; and even they who

have begun to tread in the Paths of Life, do many times thro' inadvertency ſtep aſide, or by the Violence of Temptations are hurried away into the way of Sin, and being once fall'n into it, do ſleep ſecurely in it. To remedy which Evils, theſe following Expedients were provided. *Paſtors* were appointed, whoſe Office it is to inſtruct, admoniſh, reprove and conſole: *Religious Societies* of Chriſtiſtians, or *Churches* were inſtituted as uſeful for this end, that Chriſtians might be helpful to one another, in promoting the common work of their Salvation, by inſtru-

cting the Ignorant, reclaiming ſuch as do err from the Truth; raiſing up thoſe that are caſt down, quickning the lukewarm; rebuking thoſe that commit Sin, and avoiding ſuch as be contumacious. *Religious Aſſemblies* alſo, *Publick Worſhip and Sacraments* were inſtituted, which tho' they do greatly contribute to the promoting of Chriſtians in Faith and true Holineſs, do yet notwithſtanding manifeſtly ſuppoſe *Paſtors* and *Chriſtian Societies*, and may be conſider'd by us as Sanctions of thoſe Laws whereby Paſtors and Churches are Authorized, to which we muſt give

give obedience, or be deprived of the Benefit of Publick Worſhip, and of the Comfort of the Sacraments. And laſt of all, to the end that the publick Affairs of every Church might be rightly adminiſtred, that is, that every thing might be done decently and in order, and that Communion might be kept up, and Peace and Concord *maintain'd* among the *Churches*, *Church Government* was appointed.

§. 21. Thus have I link by link turn'd over *the whole Chain of Religion*, beginning at the higheſt degree thereof, *viz.* *THE LOVE OF GOD*, which

which alone is ſought and enjoin'd for it ſelf, deſcending from this to the *immediate Means* whereby it is attain'd, and from them to ſuch as be *more remote*, until at laſt we come to the *moſt remote* of all. This account, which I have given of Religion, furniſhes us with a Key, whereby any one that is but indifferently vers'd in Theological Studies, may eaſily diſcover what place each part holds in the *Syſteme* of Religion; how one Part ſtands related to ſuch other Parts as are above, as a Mean to the End; and to ſuch as are below it, as the End to the Means: and in what degree of neceſſity every part ought

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to be held. But for the ſake of Beginners, I ſhall propoſe one or more of thoſe things in this Scheme, that deſerve the greateſt Conſideration.

§. 22. The firſt is the remarkable Difference between *Charity* or the *Love of God*, and all the other Parts of Religion; among which it hath the pre-eminence, becauſe it alone is deſired for it ſelf, and all the reſt are inſtituted for its ſake, that by their means and ſubſerviency, Mankind, which was fall'n from the pure and chaſte Love of God, into the ſtrange and adulterous Love of the Creatures, may again be reduc'd to the

Love

Love which they owe unto God. And thus Charity is related to the other Parts of Religion, as the End is to the Means: agreeable to the Apoſtle's plain Inſtruction; *The end of the Commandment is Charity.* Eph. 4, 11. Now as the wooden Frames and Scaffolds that are uſed in building, are taken away when the work is ended, they being then no longer uſeful; ſo when the *Love of God* ſhall be perfected in the hearts of thoſe that are to be ſaved, then Sacraments, Paſtours, Churches, the holy Scriptures, the renouncing of the World, the mortifying of the Fleſh,

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Repentance, Faith, and all the other Parts of Religion that are distinct from Charity, shall cease: as the same Apostle teacheth us, 1 *Cor.* 13 8. *Charity*, saith he, *never faileth, but whether there be Prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be Tongues, they shall cease; whether there be Knowledge, it shall vanish away; when that which is perfect shall come; then that which is in part shall be done away: Now abideth Faith, Hope and Charity; but the greatest of these is Charity.*

§. 23. Another thing that is to be diligently observed in this Scheme, concerneth those Parts

Parts of Religion that are distinct from Charity, their difference among themselves as they stand related to it as to their End. And in this respect, they are classed in a three-fold Difference. They are all means for recovering Charity. But (1.) Some of them are *Necessary*, and withal *Sure* and *Infallible*: others (2.) are indeed *Necessary* but *not Sure* and *Infallible:* and others (3.) finally are neither *Sure* and *Infallible*, nor *absolutely* and *Indispensably Necessary*. In the *first Rank* are *Faith in Jesus Christ* the Mediator, *Repentance*, the *mortifying of the Corrupt Nature*, or

or *the Old Man*; the *renouncing of the World* with all its Pomps and Vanities, and finally the *Weaning* of the *Heart* from the impure Love of the World, and all the Creatures which being once rooted out, the Love of God ſucceeds and is kindled up and ſhed abroad in the Heart by the Holy Ghoſt. All theſe be *indiſpenſably Neceſſary* for recovering the Love of God, and they have a ſure and infallible Mediate or Immediate Connexion therewith. In the *ſecond Rank* ſtand the *Holy Scriptures*, which for Reaſons already expreſs'd are *ſimply Neceſſary*, that Men may attain to the knowledge of

of ſuch things as it Concerns them to know and Practice, in order to their Salvation. Which nevertheleſs is not ſo to be underſtood, as if thoſe who were once well acquainted with the Doctrine of Religion delivered in the H. Scriptures, could not afterwards live a Chriſtian Life without thoſe Sacred Books. For as *Auguſtine* writes in his Treatiſe of Chriſtian Doctrine lib. 1. Ch. 39. "A Man ground-"ed in Faith, Hope and Cha-"rity and retaining them ſted-"faſtly, needs not the Scri-"ptures, except it be for the "Inſtruction of others.

"Thus

"Thus by these three many "live in the Desart without "Books; whence I think that "in them is fulfilled that say- "ing, *whether there be Pro-* "*phesies they shall fail*; or "*Tongues they shall Cease*; or "*Knowledge, it shall be de-* "*stroyed*, &c. But tho' the Scriptures be *necessary* in the degree I have mentioned, yet are they not *sure* and *Infal-* *lible* means of Salvation: See- ing very many of those who have them, and read them daily, come short of it, not for any fault in the Scriptures, but in the Persons themselves who take no care to order their Lives and Manners according

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to the Preſcripts in them delivered.

§. 24. In the *third Rank* of means of Salvation, which are neither *neceſſary* nor *ſure* and *Infallible*, are included *Paſtors*, Religious Societies, or *Churches*, *Sacraments*, *Publick Worſhip*, *Eccleſiaſtical Polity*, or Church Diſcipline, and if there be any other Inſtituted by God for this End, that Men may be excited to learn, or keep in Mind, or Practice the Duties of Religion, that are fully and clearly delivered in the Scriptures. That theſe have no ſure and infallible Connexion with the Salvation of Men, is more evident than

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to want either proof or Illuſtration: And altho' Chriſtians ought not to Neglect or Deſpiſe, but to make uſe of them when they can be had as well becauſe they are preſcribed by God, as that in the right uſe of them many excellent Advantages may be reaped; yet this will not make them abſolutely and indiſpenſably neceſſary to Salvation, for it is certain that ſuch as have the Scriptures, if they carefully and diligently peruſe them, may both diſcover the way of Salvation mark'd out in them, and having found it, may begin to walk in it, and by the Aſſiſt-

ſſiſtance of God's Grace, may conſtantly perſevere therein, until at laſt they work out their Salvation, altho' they live in ſuch a Corner of the World, where they have no Opportunities, either of Preachers whom they may hear, or of Churches, to which they may join themſelves, or (by conſequence) of Sacraments, of which they may partake. Of this we have notable Inſtances in ſome of the Hermits, particularly in *Paul* the firſt of them, who having paſs'd his whole time from his blooming Youth to an extream old Age, in a remote Deſart, without the Com-

Company or Society of any man, except *Anthony* alone, with whom he convers'd for a ſhort time, and that not long before his Death, hath deſervedly obtain'd a great Reputation for Piety in the Church of Chriſt.

SECT. III.

SECT. III.

[*Wherein ſeveral material Propoſitions and uſeful Corrollaries are deduced from the preceding Deſcriptions of this Theologie. How to diſcern betwixt the fundamental Principles of Religion, and ſuch as are not fundamental; and betwixt damnable, dangerous, and harmleſs Errors.*]

§. 25. HAving laid down the General Idea of this Theology, together with the more diſtinct and particular Explication there-

thereof, I come now to the many and weighty Propoſitions, and Rules, and Concluſions which may be deduced from this Doctrine. And indeed ſo various and manifold is the uſe of this *Comparative Theologie* (which I have already explain'd) both in a private Life, and alſo for the right ordering of the Church; it abounds with ſo many uſeful Rules and Inſtructions for every kind of Life, that it would be hard to reckon up all that might be deduced from it, by ſerions and attentive Meditation. I ſhall inſtance only in a few for a Tryal.

§. 26. Firſt

§. 26. First then by this Doctrine of *Comparative Theologie*, it plainly appears, that the *Precepts of the Christian Religion* have proceeded neither from the mere *Arbitrary Will* of God, nor from his *Wrath* and *Displeasure*; but from *Love*, *Favour*, and *Good will* toward fall'n Man. And the Reason why God hath imposed the hard Laws of *Repentance*, *Self-denial*, and the *Renouncing of the World*, as necessary to be observed by all that would be saved, is not, that he might exercise his Authority over Men, or be aveng'd on them; but because there is no other safe and

ſecure way of raiſing them to a true and laſting Happineſs, beſides that which the Precepts of Religion do preſcribe. God might indeed by vertue of his Omnipotence have reſtored Man, who was fall'n into Sin and Miſery, unto his original holy and happy State, without the Intervention of a *Medicinal Penitence*. But recent experience and the notable inſtance of inſtability and inconſtancy, which *Adam* had given, do evidently diſcover that nothing was to be expected this way, but that *Adam* having lightly eſcaped ſo great a Danger, would have been the more preſumptuous to offend again;

or

or if his Experience had made him more cautious and wary, yet his Children would readily have relapſed into his Sin and Miſery. So that if this Method had been taken for recovering fall'n Man, its probable that *Adam* only would have been ſaved by it. For this reaſon it was more agreeable both to the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God, to grant unto fall'n Man regreſs and return unto his firſt State of Happineſs by the way of *Penitence* only, which tho' it be the more difficult, yet is it the moſt ſafe and infallible. For as thoſe who come to great Fortunes, either by

Succeſſion to their Parents, or by the Bounty of their Prince, are more probably enclin'd to ſquander away their Wealth, than others, who have acquir'd Riches by their own Induſtry and Labour, after they have felt the pinching Difficulties of Want and Poverty: So it is not to be doubted, but thoſe Men who have with Difficulty wreſtled out of the deep Gulf of Sin and Miſery, and have come to Happineſs, by the rough, uneaſy and narrow way of *Penitence*, will prove far more conſtant in the Love of their Creator, and more firm and reſolute in ſuſtaining and répelling

ling the assaults of Temptations, than was either *Adam*, who was created in a State of Felicity, or than his Posterity would have been, in case that Happiness had been by Succession transmitted unto them from *Adam*.

§. 27. If it shall here be enquired, might not God have restored man immediatly after his Fall, and having restored, confirmed him also in grace and holiness, and put him out of all danger of falling again any more, so as he should not have been afterward obnoxious unto Sin, no more than the glorious Angels? I answer, that a *con-*

firmed State of Grace and Holineſs, is both the Fruit and Reward of a previous and tried Conſtancy and Firmneſs in the Love of God. That it was granted upon no other Conditions to the Angels, who perſiſted in their Duty and Fidelity, nor would have been given unto *Adam*, ſuppoſe he had not ſinned, till after a competent time of Tryal faithfully ſpent in the Love of God: Finally, that it is not poſſible that a reaſonable Creature can attain to a conſummated State of Perfection by any other way, without infringing its Liberty, which God will have pre-

preſerv'd ſafe and inviolate.

[§. For ſuch is the *Nature of Liberty*, that without hurt and prejudice to it ſelf, it cannot allow, that any of the Faculties that are under its Conduct, eſpecially the Will, ſhould be determined by any other Principle than it ſelf, in their application to this rather than the other ſuitable Object, after this, rather than the other manner. Nevertheleſs it will ſuffer it ſelf to be fixed and bound either to good or evil by cords of its own making; ſuch are the *Habits* contracted by long and continued Exerciſes of the Acts of Love, Deſire,

Complacency, Enjoyment, and the like, upon the ſame Objects: whereby a Man finds himſelf puſh'd forward to the Love, Deſire, and Enjoyment of thoſe Objects: and drawn back when he offers to ſeparate and withdraw his Affections from them; ſo that without Difficulty and Violence done to himſelf, he cannot abſtain from the Acts unto which ſuch Habits do diſpoſe him, no more than exerciſe thecontrary; which hath given the riſe to that vulgar Maxim *Cuſtom is a ſecond Nature.*

§. This is plain and undeniable in the Caſe of Evil Ha-

Habits that are ſo common and ordinary. For who knows not that a Glutton, a Drunkard, or a Laſcivious Perſon, for Example, are ſo enſlaved to thoſe vicious Habits and Luſts which they ſerve, that they cannot without great Difficulty and much ſtrugling, refrain from ſatiating their ſenſual Deſires and Appetites, when they have it in their Power, nor be reclaimed from their diſſolute Converſation, to a Sober, a Temperate, and a chaſte Converſation. This the Prophet *Jeremy* doth ſignificantly expreſs, when he ſaith, *Can the Æthiopian change his Colour, or the*

Leo-

Leopard his Spots. Then may ye alſo do good, who are accuſtomed to do evil. Jer. 13. 23.

§. Nor is there leſs force and efficacy in *Good Habits*, which are contracted by a long courſe of good Actions perform'd by the Power of the Holy Ghoſt, whereby the old man is ſubdued and mortified, the new, quickned and advanced by degrees, till in the end he become a perfect Man. For when any Perſon is once come this length, he becomes ready, forward and inclin'd to Good; ſlow, backward and averſe to Evil. As St. *John* inſtructs us. *Whoſoever is born of God doth not com-*

commit Sin, for the ſeed of God abideth in him, and he cannot ſin becauſe he is born of God. 1 Joh. 3. 9. To this the Experience alſo of the Regenerate, who declare that they find it ſo, doth perfectly agree.

§. After that theſe good or evil Habits have received their proper and ſuitable improvements from God, that is, after he has fortified and eſtabliſhed the good, by renewed meaſures and communications of his Grace; and has plyed the Evil with repeated endeavours, and all to no purpoſe, to reclaim them, when he reſolves that the

the Graces of his Spirit ſhall not be any more proſtituted to the Scorn and Contempt of thoſe who are rooted in Sin; and when he rewards the Godly for the good uſe that they have made of their Liberty, with plentiful meaſures of Grace, and takes the Government of their free will (after they have freely reſigned it) into his own hands: then follows the final, unchangeable and endleſs Obduration of the wicked in ſin, and the eſtabliſhment of the Godly in Grace and Holineſs. Whence it appears, that rational free Creatures can neither be eſtabliſh'd in a State

of

of Grace, nor hardened into a State of Sin, without infringing their Liberty, except the free uſe and exerciſe thereof in Good or Evil (which in good at leaſt muſt be habitual) have gone before it.]

§. 28. Secondly, This Doctrine of *Comparative Theologie* diſcovers the ground of that which the Apoſtle delivers, 1 *Cor.* 13. where he declares that thoſe Parts of Religion which are commonly moſt eſteemed, ſuch are, much knowledge in divine Things, Orthodoxy, Faith and ſuffering of Perſecution for the true Religion even unto death)

death) will be improfitable to Salvation without *Charity*; becauſe theſe and all other things pertaining to Religion, are for this end ordain'd and enjoin'd by God, that by them Men may be brought to *Charity* or the Love of God; ſo that if they do not attain to that end, they become vain and improfitable. Wherefor they are far deceiv'd who conceive good hopes, and entertain a good Opinion of themſelves, and of their own Spiritual Condition, becauſe they do belong to this, or the other Party of Chriſtians, becauſe they are diligent and aſſiduous, in Hearing, Reading, Praying and

and Communicating; all these being too weak Supporters whereupon to build a solid Hope of Salvation. For, unless Men will denounce War against their corrupt Nature, renounce the World and deny themselves, they shall never recover the *True and Sincere Love of God*; and without the unfeigned *Love of God*, they shall never come to his Presence, nor to the Dwelling-place of the Blessed.

§. 29. Thirdly, This Theology teacheth us, how to distinguish between the *Essential* or *Fundamental Principles* of Religion, and those that

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are *not fundamental.* And here I take the Eſſence of Religion not ſtrictly, for all that which belongeth to Religion always, and in all States (in which ſenſe the *Love of God* alone makes up the whole Eſſence of Religion) but more largely for all thoſe things which are neceſſary for Men, conſidered in a State of corrupt Nature, that they may be fitted for and brought into the Enjoyment of Eternal Happineſs. Now whereas ſome parts of Religion, are means of Salvation, both neceſſary; and ſure or infallible, others neceſſary, but not ſure; and others are indeed means

means of Salvation, but neither ſure nor neceſſary; it is evident that the Precepts and Inſtitutions of the third Claſs do by no means belong to the Tribe of the Fundamentals of Religion. Moreover, becauſe a fundamental of Religion properly ſo called, is, that the Knowledge whereof is neceſſary to Salvation directly, and of it ſelf; and all the Precepts and Inſtitutions of the firſt Claſs, and they only are ſuch; from this, it does appear that the whole Family of the *Fundamentals* of Religion is contain'd within the Limits of the firſt Claſs. But becauſe Men can by

by no other means come to the certain Knowledge of the Fundamentals of Religion, than by the *Scriptures*; therefor to know the Scriptures and to acknowledge them for a ſure and infallible Rule of Faith, may be call'd a *ſecondary Fundamental* Principle of Religion.

§. 30. Fourthly, This Theology teacheth alſo the difference of *Errors*; that ſome are *damnable* and *pernicious*; ſome *dangerous* only, and ſome *harmleſs*: All thoſe Errors touching Faith and Religion, which do neceſſarily ſubvert ſome *Fundamental* principle of Religion, and that

that in the Opinion and Judgment of the erring Perſon, or that cannot ſubſiſt at the ſame time, and in the ſame Mind with the Belief of the Fundamental Principles of Religion. Theſe and theſe only are to be look'd upon as *deſtructive* and *damnable*, and as ſuch, are with great Care and Diligence to be expell'd out of the Confines of the Church. For the Chriſtian Religion is like a Bridge by which alone Men can go from this Valley of Miſeries to the bleſſed Regions of Light and Peace; and the *fundamental Principles* of Religion are as ſo many

ny Arches, which join'd and united together, do make up this Bridge, and therefore thoſe Errors that do overturn any of the fundamental Principles of Religion, do as it were, cut out an Arch from the Bridge, whereby a Breach is made in it, and the Paſſage by it into Heaven is thus cut off and obſtructed.

§. 31. Again thoſe *Errors* are to be avoided as *dangerous*, whoſe tendency is to make Men remiſs and negligent in the buſineſs of their Salvation: of this kind is that Error aſcribed to *Origen*, concerning the *Puniſhment of the Devils and Damned*. That after a long

long courſe of time they ſhall come to an End, and that the Damned themſelves ſhall at laſt be tranſlated into the Habitations of the Bleſſed. By which Doctrine, it is evident, that the fear of Hell, and the force thereof to reſtrain Men from Sin, is in great meaſure weakned and infringed. Finally, thoſe Errors may be tolerated as *harmleſs*, whereby a Chriſtian who is in the way of Salvation, is neither lett nor retarded in his courſe; ſuch was the Error of St. *Cyprian* concerning the *Rebaptization of Hereticks*; and another of *Irenæus*, who writes that our Saviour was

was fifty years old when he ſuffered.

§. 32. From hence in the 5th place we may draw *Rules* and *Principles*, for directing not only private Chriſtians, how far they may entertain or refuſe *External Communion* with the different, yea adverſe Sects and Societies of Chriſtians into which the Unity of the Chriſtian Church is miſerably divided and rent aſunder: But Church Governours alſo in the making and abrogating Eccleſiaſtical Laws. For, whereas the End and Deſign of thoſe Chriſtian Societies, which we call Churches, is, that

that by their Help, every private Chriſtian may be forwarded in a Courſe of Piety, and aſſiſted in working out their Salvation: It is plain; *Firſt*, That a Chriſtian, who lays the work of his Salvation to heart, ought (if his Circumſtances will permit him) to join himſelf unto, and aſſociate with thoſe Churches, wherein the beſt helps to Piety are to be found. Next, that he muſt abſtain from the Communion of thoſe Churches, whoſe Fellowſhip is apt to hinder or retard his Progreſs in true Piety, either becauſe the purity of the Chriſtian Do-

ctrine is therein corrupted with evil Principles, and ſuch as flatter corrupt Nature, or becauſe the Force and Efficacy of ſound and wholeſome Doctrine is impair'd and enervated, by the miſchievous Examples of a worldly Life; or finally, becauſe the Priviledge of Communion is annexed to ſomething that is unlawful, as a neceſſary Condition thereof. *Thirdly*, That the Communion of that Church whereof he is a Member already, and whoſe Fellowſhip, tho' it be little uſeful to Piety, yet is not prejudicial to it, ſhould be continued in, in caſe it cannot be forſaken with-

without ſome great Inconvenience.

§. 33. For the ſame reaſon alſo it becomes the Duty of all thoſe who are promoted to the Government of Churches to make uſe of their Power and Authority for *Edification*, and not for *Deſtruction*, not enjoining any thing that is not conducive to Chriſtians, their Advancement in true Piety, nor requiring any thing as a neceſſary Condition of External Communion, which any ſober Perſon in his right Mind, and who is acted by a ſerious and ſincere Deſire, after Holineſs, cannot perform with a

good Conſcience; leſt they chance to debar from the external Communion of their Church, thoſe whom Chriſt hath honour'd with inward and Spiritual Communion with himſelf, and with the Saints, that is, with the inviſible Church. And finally, conſtraining no Perſons againſt their Mind and Conſcience, to an external Communion with any Church.

[§. In this Corrolary we may behold, as in a Glaſs, *The deplorble State of the Chriſtian World* at this Day, wherein almoſt every Sect of Chriſtians, at leaſt the Ruling Part among them, do require the Be-

Belief and Profeſſion of their peculiar and diſtinguiſhing Doctrines, which are ſome of them obſcure, others doubtful and incertain, and others falſe, as a neceſſary Condition of Communion, ſowing by this means the Seeds of Diſcord, and Diviſion, and Hatred among Chriſtians, inſtead of that Unity, and Love, and Concord, which our Saviour ſo earneſtly recommended to his Diſciples. Nor is this all, but they do what in them lies to force all others, by Mulcts, Baniſhments, and Corporal Puniſhments, to embrace their Communion, and to fulfil the

Conditions thereof; and by ſo doing, inſtead of making Men Chriſtians, they only make them Hypocrites; of all Sinners the moſt hateful in the ſight of God.]

§. 34. Laſt of all, from this Scheme of *Comparative Theogie*, it does plainly appear, that *Church Government* is ſuch a Mean of recovering the Love of God, as is neither neceſſary, nor ſure and infallible, and conſequently, that it is not a *Fundamental Principle*, nor an Eſſential Member of the Chriſtian Religion; and that in the Body thereof, it holds the Place, not of the Heart or other Vitals, but

but of the more extream Parts. This is a Matter that ought to be well conſidered by all Chriſtians, but eſpecially by thoſe among whom bitter Envyings, and Strifes, and Contentions are kept up, Diſcord and Tumults are raiſed, Animoſities and Hatred are exerciſed about *particular Forms of Church Government and Diſcipline*, to the great Reproach of Chriſtianity, the Scandal of the Weak, and the woeful Decay, or (ſhall I ſay) the utter Ruin and Subverſion of true Piety. How much better were it, and more conducive to the Honour of the Chriſtian Re-

ligion, to Piety and to Peace, that Chriſtians ſhould rather exerciſe a mutual Forbearance in this Caſe, by allowing every one free Liberty to think, and ſpeak, and act as they pleaſe, in theſe and other ſuch like Matters that are remote from the Center of Religion, concerning which, ſincere Lovers of Truth and Holineſs may differ in their Judgments, and that without any prejudice to mutual Love and the Duties of Charity, either among ſingle Perſons, or among the Societies of Chriſtians and Churches.

The

[*The Concluſion,*

Wherein the uſe of this Theologie is more particularly declared. The Inconveniency to which they are expoſed, who are not acquainted with it. The Character of one who follows its direction. The Epilogue.]

[§. FRom all that has been ſaid, the notable uſe and neceſſity of this *Comparative Theologie* does abundantly appear; For he who does not underſtand the various and differing reſpects

and relations of the ſeveral parts of Religion among themſelves (which this Theology teaches) cannot but often ſtumble and fall, and wander in his way to eternal Life. For either,

§. *Firſt*, he will conſider all the Parts of Religion as Equal, and ſtanding upon the ſame Level, and ſo will apply himſelf to them indifferently without Order or Choice, practiſing now one Duty, then another, as his Inclinations or Circumſtances ſhall prompt him: not unlike to an unskilful Husbandman, that ſhould take much Pains in Sowing, Digging, Tilling, Har-

Harrowing, *&c.* his Ground, without any regard to the Order or Seaſon that ought to be obſerved therein; for as this Man would unavoidably fall ſhort of the hoped for Reward of his Labours, I mean, of a plentiful Harveſt; ſo the other would infallibly loſe the Fruit and Reward of a Religious Converſation, *viz.* Regeneration and Eternal Life. Now I make no doubt but there are many ſuch to be found among the Profeſſors of Chriſtianity, who conſidering only what is common to all the Parts and Precepts of their Religion, *viz.* The ſtamp of Divine Autho-

Authority, and not adverting to the proper and peculiar Aims of every one of them in particular, do keep a mighty Stir, and are much taken up about Religion to little purpoſe, without making any conſiderable Progreſs in it; like the Men of *Sodom*, who *being ſmitten with Blindneſs, wearied themſelves in vain*, to find the Door of *Lot*'s Houſe, and ſeem to be pointed out by the Apoſtle under the figure of *ſilly Women, who are ever learning, and never able to come to the* (ſaving and Practical) *Knowledge of the Truth*. Or,

§. *Secondly*,

§. *Secondly*, He will prefer the *leſſer* and *lighter* Matters of Religion, to ſuch as be *greater* and *more weighty*: with which our Saviour upbraids the Scribes and Phariſees, who *paid Tythes* of *Mint*, *Cummin and Aniſe*, but *neglected the weightier things of the Law*, *Judgment*, *Mercy and Truth*. A fault whereof the greater part of Chriſtians are guilty, who put a greater Value upon a *right Belief and Perſwaſion* touching things *leſs neceſſary*, ſuch as are almoſt all the diſtinguiſhing Doctrines of every Sect of Chriſtians, together with ſome Religious Rites

Rites and particular Rules and Forms of Church Diſcipline and Government, much controverted in theſe Times, concerning which, a Man may think and act thus, or otherwiſe (provided he act not againſt his Conſcience) without prejudice to his Salvation, than they do upon *Holineſs of Heart and Life*, without which, no man ſhall ſee God. *Heb.* 12. 14, being leſs ſollicitous for this than the other. For as in their own Practice, they ſtudy more to be *Orthodox*, than to be *Humble, Charitable, Mortified to the World and Self-denied*;

denied; ſo they do with open Arms receive into their Communion all that do agree with them in Doctrine and Worſhip, be their Lives never ſo ſenſual and worldly, but do exclude as Aliens and Strangers, all ſuch as differ from them, in theſe Matters, be their Lives otherwiſe never ſo harmleſs and holy, ſeeking rather to gain Diſciples and Followers to their own way and party, than to Chriſt and his Religion; who, if with the Proſelytes of the Scribes and Phariſees they grow not worſe, yet will certainly get little more by their Change, than an exchange of Opinions,

nions, and of the Modes and Circumſtances of External Worſhip.

§. They do alſo ſplit upon this ſame Rock, who, neglecting the Capital Vertues of the Chriſtian Religion, take up their reſt in the means ſubſervient thereunto, ſuch as are the Scriptures, Sermons, Sacraments, and the like (whoſe uſe is to inſtruct Men in the eſſential Duties of Religion, to ſtir them up to, and aſſiſt them in the performance of them) in which we may obſerve many to be much employed, who do think that in ſo doing, they have reaſonably well

well discharged their Duty as Christians, tho' they never aspire after *Humility*, the *Mortification of the Flesh*, the *renouncing of the World*, and the Love of God and their Neighbour, for the sake of which, all those other things wherewith they are so much taken up, were purely intended and appointed: not a whit wiser than one who intending a Journey to some remote Country or City, should Employ all his Time and Care in providing and viewing of Horses, Chariots, Servants, Provisions and other Necessaries for a Journey, and in the mean time, never

never ſtir a foot from Home, to ſet forward on the Journey. Or,

§. They will Slight and Neglect the *Inferiour Miniſtring* and *ſubſervient Parts and Duties* of Religion, and ſeek to come at thoſe of the higheſt Rank and Degree without them: with no better Succeſs, than if a Man ſhould endeavour to get up to the top of a high Tower without the help of the Stairs, that lead to it, by throwing out his Arms, ſtraining his Body and ſtanding on tip-toe. And this fault is but too common among Chriſtians, who imagine they can attain to

In-

Internal vertues of Contrition, Humility, Contempt of the World, Self-denial, the Love of God, *&c.* by Meditation and thinking only, without Practiſing the External good Works that diſpoſe and lead thereunto, and without avoiding the Allurements and Temptations to the contrary Vices, ſuch as be Riches, Honours, Pleaſures, and the Familiarity and Friendſhip of worldly-minded-Men: acting in this with as little Colour of Reaſon, as one, who being ſhut up in a dark Priſon or plunged in Snow up to the Chin, ſhould expect to be enlightned and warmed by

by the mere force of his Imagination, without comeing forth into the bright and warm Sun.

To theſe we may add ſome others, who boaſt of inward Manifeſtations of the Spirit, Commnion with God, Spiritual Joys, and ſuch like Rewards aud Comforts of a pure Heart, altho' they have not as yet purged out the old leaven of Carnal Luſts, and Earthly Affections, embracing thus the Shadow for the Subſtance.

§. On the Contrary, he who is Acquainted with the Doctrine of this Pure and Peaceable *Theologie*, and will chuſe

chuſe to follow its Directions, he conſiders *Charity* or the *Love of God*, as the great *End*, and the other *Duties* and *Vertues* belonging to the Chriſtian Religion as the *Means* appointed for attaining thereunto: And accordingly, he makes the firſt his great Aim and Buſineſs, and the reſt he regardeth and uſeth only in Conſideration of their ſubſerviency to this firſt. He reads the Scriptures, Meditates, hears Sermons, receives the Sacraments, and performs other ſubſervient Duties of Religion, not that he may reſt in them, but that by their means he may be ſtir-

ſtirred up and helped forward to the contempt of himſelf and the World, and to the love of God, and of his Neighbour for God's ſake. Knowing that all the Labour that's laid out that way is loſt, if it do not Contribute to this End. And as, tho' Eating and Drinking are the neceſſary Means of Life and Health, and yet Men muſt not be always Eating and Drinking, but muſt allow ſome time for Digeſtion; ſo he obſerves a Mediocrity in Reading the Scriptures, hearing Sermons, *&c.* avoiding Exceſs therein as hurtful.

§. There

§. There is no help to Piety, how mean and contemptible ſoever it may appear which he either contemns in his own Practice, or condemns in anothers, yet is he not ſo much wedded to any External Means of Salvation, which are not neceſſary, but that he can lay them aſide, in caſe that through long uſe, or rather abuſe, they are become improfitable or hurtful, as was the Brazen Serpent; he is neither ſo fond nor ſo afraid of any Religious Rite or Ceremony, or Eccleſiaſtical Cuſtom that is Innocent, and being indifferent in it ſelf, may be uſed for

for a good End, but he can either uſe or abſtain from it as the Peace of the Church, or the edification of his Neighbour does require herein, imitating the Apoſtle, who *To the Jews became as a Jew, that he might gain the Jews; to them that were under the Law, as under the Law, that he might gain them that were under the Law; to them who were without the Law as without the Law, that he might gain them that were without Law; to the weak he became as weak, that he might gain the weak, finally he was made all things unto all Men, that he might by all means ſave ſome.* 1 Cor. 9. 20, *&c.* §. The

§. The *Neceſſary Fundamental Truths* of Religion, he finds to be but few, to which he firmly adheres, and lays them up carefully in his Heart, but is leſs taken up with the reſt, concerning which he loves not to debate with any perſon, well knowing, that as few Controverſies were ever ended this way, ſo the Minds of Men are thereby diverted from the Study of Holineſs, and Hatred, Animoſities, Diviſions, and Perſecutions are begotten and fomented; and that a further Progreſs and Advancement in the ſaving knowledge of the Truth, is

better attain'd by holy living, than by much Diſputing; he maintains an inward ſpiritual Communion of Love and Affection with all that truly fear God, and ſincerely ſeek him; however much they may differ from him, and among themſelves concerning the Matters of Religion that are leſs neceſſary: being ready to entertain external Communion with 'em, ſo far as the Terms and Conditions of external Communion which they require, will allow, and ſo far as they do not obſtruct the Love of God, and the Mortifying of our corrupt Nature: but carefully

fully avoids the Company and Familiarity of all wicked and worldly-minded Men, as hurtful and contagious, altho' they agree with him in the Profeſſion of the ſame Doctrine and outward Worſhip.]

§. 35. Theſe inferences ought to have been treated with more accuracy and at greater length, but the ſhortneſs of the time allotted for this Exerciſe, hath obliged me to abridge them, and ſilently to paſs over others of ſome conſequence. Beſides, I'm afraid my Hearers may already be weary of this Diſcourſe, which the great

variety of Matter, that of neceſſity muſt be crowded into its narrow bounds hath rendred more profitable than pleaſant. And therefore I ſhall here put a ſtop to it, heartily recommending the Heads of it to you, *my dear Fellow-Students*, to be further digeſted, amplified and enlarged by you, in your more retir'd Thoughts and private Meditations: And to the Father of Lights, to be by Him plentifully watered with the Bleſſing of Heaven.

To the All-Good, All-Wiſe, and All-Mighty Lord our God, Father, Son, and and Holy Spirit, be Praiſe and Glory for ever. *Amen.*